Introduction to Creativity and Giftedness: Three Decades of Inquiry and Development

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The rise of contemporary interest in the gifted and talented is often anchored in the Marland report (1972), and the growth of interest in theory and research on creativity arose from the efforts of a number of pioneers in the mid- to late-1950s, including several scholars whose work appeared frequently in *Gifted Child Quarterly.* The rise of interest in creativity is often attributed to the J. P. Guilford's (1950) presidential address to the American Psychological Association; his extensive work on the Structure of Intellect model (e.g., Guilford, 1959, 1967, 1977) also served as a catalyst for new and expanding conceptions of intelligence and giftedness. John Curtis Gowan, a former NAGC executive director and editor of *Gifted Child Quarterly,* was also a leading figure in studying creativity and its relationships with giftedness and educational programming. E. Paul Torrance's pioneering work served as the foundation for many advances in assessing and nurturing creativity. He was also an eminent contributor to gifted education through his work on the development of programming to support the interests and needs of gifted and talented students (and the teachers and mentors who guide them). Calvin W. Taylor's work on multiple talents challenged us to look at the powerful

contributions of creativity to talented accomplishments in many domains. Taylor's efforts to bring scholars together for scientific dialogue on creativity and talent through the Utah Conferences on creativity (across three decades) also stimulated and sustained inquiry in both areas. The early emphasis by Osborn (1953, 1963) and Parnes (1967) on fostering creative behavior and nurturing personal and group creativity provided the foundations for many programming initiatives in gifted education. Thus, the interactions between gifted education and creativity span a common time line of more than 30 years of theory, research, development, and application in both areas.

These interactions have also involved more than a set of historical parallels; studies of giftedness and creativity have also been intertwined in substantive ways. The *Gifted Child Quarterly* articles represented in this anthology highlight many of the major themes and issues of that shared concern. The articles reflect five core themes that express our efforts to grasp common conceptual and theoretical challenges, our struggles to clarify and sort out areas of confusion and concern, and the challenges for research and practice that we face today. These five themes are:

- **Definition.** What do we mean by giftedness, talent, or creativity? How are they related to, or independent of, each other?
- **Characteristics.** What are the indicators of giftedness and creativity in people? What factors influence their development or expression?
- **Justification.** Why are giftedness and creativity important in education?
- **Assessment.** How might giftedness and creativity be recognized or identified?
- **Nurture.** What are the implications of creativity and giftedness for teaching, learning, and personal growth and development? Can they be developed through deliberate interventions? What factors contribute to the success of such efforts?

Taken together, this set of articles illuminates several perspectives on those questions. First, the articles demonstrate how our knowledge has expanded over several decades of work, highlighting progress that we have made. Second, they illustrate how several themes and questions have evolved and changed; we may still be searching for answers, but we have refined the questions. Third, the articles also make us aware that some puzzling or perplexing issues have been stubbornly persistent. Finally, the articles reveal the origins or "seeds" of new and emerging challenges that are beginning to grow in the field. Throughout these articles, we encounter the struggles that continue to make the problems of creativity and giftedness fascinating and exciting (if sometimes frustrating) to study.

DEFINITION

Other volumes in this series address the complex questions of understanding and defining giftedness; let us, therefore, focus specifically on the insights about the nature of creativity that we might gain from the articles in this volume. The articles here highlight a number of key issues. These include:

- The difficulty of finding a single definition that accommodates the breadth, complexity, and diversity of creativity.
- The need to look at creativity over extended periods of time—taking a long look rather than a "snapshot."
- The importance of sustained interest, passion, and intensity in the foundation for creativity.
- The reality of creativity in groups as well as within the individual.

The articles also highlight our understanding of creativity as a deceptively simple name for what is, in reality, a complex set of variables that are both grounded in specific talent domains and also inclusive of a number of commonalities or process dimensions that cut across content or talents. Taylor, Torrance, and others viewed creativity and creative process as variables that cut across many talent areas or domains. Runco (1993) described the evolving understanding and role of divergent thinking in creativity, and Delcourt (1993) emphasized the importance of non-cognitive dimensions of creative productivity (including motivation, energy, and commitment. While Sternberg and Lubart (1993) viewed creative giftedness as a distinct type of giftedness, they also emphasized the importance of intellectual processes, knowledge, thinking styles, motivation, and environmental influences on creativity. Taken as a set, the seminal articles in this volume not only highlighted the complex nature of creativity, but also demonstrated clearly that creativity transcends the borders or boundaries of culture, geography, gender, or economics, and that our understanding of the construct, while having evolved and matured, still includes many challenging and unanswered questions.

CHARACTERISTICS

The articles reprinted here describe many personal characteristics associated with creativity. That, in itself is hardly novel or powerful; there have been numerous lists of the many and varied characteristics of "creative people" throughout the literature on creativity and giftedness. Viewing these articles as a group, however, does offer more fascinating insights that have, in several ways, paved the way for current and emerging trends in research and development. From the earliest articles in the set by Torrance (1980, 1981, 1984), Gowan (1980), and Davis (1981, 1989) to the more recent contributions by Runco (1993), Delcourt (1993), or Sternberg and Lubart (1993), these insights include arguments that creativity characteristics:

- Involve intense, sustained personal interests, persistence, efforts, and (in Torrance's words) the "long look," passions.
- Extend beyond the traditional cognitive views of divergent thinking.
- May be expressed in various ways or settings at different times, and can be closely related to opportunities for products and expressions that are shared with others.

- Involve style preferences, not just cognitive abilities or personality traits.
- The extension of these insights into today's efforts are reflected, for example, in recent syntheses of creativity characteristics, such as the four broad categories proposed by Treffinger, Young, Selby, and Schoonover (2002): *Generating Ideas, Digging Deeper into Ideas, Openness and Courage to Explore Ideas,* and *Listening to One's "Inner Voice*."

The articles in this set also challenged readers to look at multiple sources of data, to provide opportunities for students to be able to express or exhibit creativity in authentic ways, or as Taylor and Sacks wrote, "to see themselves as thinkers and producers" (1981, p. 117).

As the writers in these articles began to describe the variety and diversity of creative expression in people, they created a foundation—implicitly, and in some cases, explicitly—for research that extended beyond "level" of creativity ("How creative are you?") to "style" of creativity ("How are you creative?"). The level/style differentiation, and the articulation and investigation of creativity or problem-solving style, are among the major themes and issues being addressed by researchers and developers today (e.g., Isaksen & Dorval, 1993; Kirton, 1999; Selby, Treffinger, Isaksen, & Lauer, in press). The interrelationships among giftedness, creativity, and learning style have also been reviewed by Treffinger and Selby (2003, in press).

JUSTIFICATION

Our understanding of the fundamental concerns in education often seems to swing, pendulum-like, between an emphasis on content and on process; it has always been difficult to maintain a healthy, harmonious, and productive balance between these concerns, both of which we must certainly recognize as essential to human progress, and perhaps even to survival. The articles in this set offer inspiration and challenge by addressing eloquently the importance of creativity in life and work, and the great need for society not to overlook its creative contributors. The article by Taylor and Sacks (1981) highlights the lifelong value of creativity for people, organizations, society, and the world, and Taylor reinforced that argument in his 1984 article. These articles recognize the important contributions of creativity to health and life-sustaining energy, to the ability to manage change constructively, and to "future-making." Schack (1993) extends the justification of creativity in education in a very important way, recognizing that students at many ability levels, not just those identified as "gifted and talented" benefit from creativity, a point also clear in Gordon and Poze's (1980) earlier article that demonstrates how students of varied ability benefit from opportunities to learn and apply *SES Synectics*.

Change is not an option in the world in which today's children live now and will live and work as adults; it is a certainty. The authors in these articles speak

clearly and with conviction about the importance of creativity for health and success under these circumstances.

ASSESSMENT

It is quite likely that anyone who specializes in creativity—whether in the educational world or in other settings—will be familiar with the phone call, letter, or email message that says, more or less directly in these words, "I need to measure people's creativity. What test should I use?" Commonly, these queries seek a single, objectively scored, externally normed (and inexpensive) measure, the result of which is a single "creativity score." The articles in this set, from the earliest pieces by Khatena (1982) or Torrance (1980, 1981, 1984) to the 1995 article by Hunsaker and Callahan, describe the challenge of assessing creativity. They affirm the possibility of assessing creativity in people, but at the same time, they speak clearly to the myths, misunderstandings, and misuses that have long persisted and that are still prevalent today. Beyond the search for the elusive "creativity number," they offer reminders of several important principles.

- We need multiple sources of data to assess creativity in its rich and varied forms of expression (and the sources of data we use should be logical and sensible in relation to our understanding and definition of creativity).
- While divergent thinking is one dimension that can be assessed, and which can add important and useful information to our efforts, there are many other variables that also must be considered, and that our understanding of the nature and role of divergent thinking itself has also continued to evolve.
- If we seek to recognize creativity in children, we need to provide opportunities for creative behavior to occur.
- It is not appropriate to expect a single, all-encompassing measure of creativity that can be expressed as a single score.

NURTURE

What are the implications of creativity and giftedness for teaching, learning, and personal growth and development? Can they be developed through deliberate interventions? What factors contribute to the success of such efforts?

The two-decade perspective offered by these articles addresses several key issues that continue to be major themes in research and practice today. From Torrance's 1980 and 1981 articles, through Sternberg and Lubart's 1993 article, for example, the writings emphasize the importance of culture and climate in nurturing creativity. Current research on the climate for creativity (e.g., Ekvall, 1997; Isaksen, Lauer, & Ekvall, 1999; Isaksen, Lauer, Ekvall, & Britz, 2001) affirms the importance of these issues, and extends our understanding of the operational dimensions of the climate that enhances (or inhibits) creativity. In addition

to emphasizing the importance of the climate for creativity within an organization or culture, the articles in this set also remind us that creativity is a near-universal concern that knows no boundaries of culture or geography, and that there is much to learn about its nature and nurture from cross-cultural perspectives.

Deliberate efforts to foster creativity are reflected in the work of many of the authors in this set. There is a common optimism among the authors, and a shared commitment to the goal that Osborn (1963, p. xxi) expressed more than four decades ago, "to bring a more creative trend to education." In the early years of interest in creativity research, there was considerable discussion about whether or not it was possible to foster creativity through training or instruction. Today, as a result of many development and research efforts, we can be confident that deliberate efforts to nurture creativity are possible (e.g., Torrance, 1987; Aleinikov, 2002). Research now extends this line of inquiry by challenging us to address the question, "What works best, for whom, and under what conditions?" In the articles in this set, the foundations for today's inquiry can be observed in several ways: Torrance's discussion of creativity as the essence of good teaching, Davis's (1981) "personal creativity techniques" and identification of objectives and activities for teaching creative thinking, or Delcourt's (1993) emphasis on the need to link identification and programming in more powerful ways, for example. My 1986 article attempted to frame many of the issues and opportunities associated with systematic efforts to nurture creativity in educational settings; many of those issues continue to frame our ongoing research, development, and training initiatives. Schack's (1993) article provides an example of the importance of research in assessing and documenting the effectiveness and impact of programs to foster creativity and problem solving. Gordon and Poze (1980) address the value and effects of training in creativity methods and tools for all students, demonstrating that both high ability and average ability derive benefits from the instruction, although they may derive different benefits and apply what they have learned in different ways. This early article also lends support to contemporary work on differentiating instruction, and reminds us that differentiation may require educators to consider not just content or curriculum alone, but process, and the interactions of content, process, and learner characteristics. Torrance's reports of the importance of mentoring and fostering self-directed learning also provided early contributions that helped create the foundation for areas of research and development that continue to engage researchers and practitioners today (e.g., McCluskey & Mays 2003; Treffinger, 2003). Recognizing, assessing, and nurturing creativity continue to be dynamic, evolving topics in gifted education, and the articles in this volume offer us a rich portrait of the origins of that dynamism and energy.

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